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ABSTRACT

Changes in family relations that result from concurrent life-cycle changes of middle-aged parents and their adolescent offspring are discussed in this pamphlet. A perspective on the young adolescent's family is offered that conceptualizes the family as both systemic and developmental. Key changes in adolescence and mid-life are outlined and these are discussed in terms of disequilibriums that may occur if the family system fails to alter in line with these changes. Problems occur in this period of disequilibrium if a family is unable or reluctant to modify patterns of interaction. For example, some parents insist on adhering to the child-rearing practices that served them well when their children were younger. Problems may also occur if a family becomes trapped in a phase of disequilibrium and is unable to move on. A short bibliographic essay on other writings on adolescence and mid-life is included in the pamphlet. (Author/SS)

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Understanding Families with Young Adolescents

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by Laurence D. Steinberg

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Understanding Families with Young Adolescents

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Early Adolescence and Mid-Life: A Bibliographic Essay

by Alice Phoebe Naylor and Evie Wilson
Young Adult Services, American Library Association

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Introduction

"For is it not possible that middle age can be looked upon as a period of second flowering, second growth, even a kind of second adolescence? . . . The signs that presage growth, so similar, it seems to me to those in early adolescence: discontent, restlessness, doubt, despair, longing, are interpreted falsely as signs of decay. In youth one does not as often misinterpret the signs. . . . One takes them seriously, listens to them, follows where they lead."

--Anne Morrow Lindbergh
Gift From the Sea
Pantheon Books

Adolescence and middle age -- "second adolescence," to use Anne Morrow Lindbergh's term -- come together inexorably in one human condition: parenthood. There may in fact be great pleasure rather than discomfort ahead for parents as their children approach and enter adolescence. Studies of young adolescents report that the most important people in their lives, according to the youths themselves, are their parents; that self-esteem of young adolescents is more dependent upon their feelings toward their parents than their friends; that most young adolescents turn to their parents as the continuing source of their values. Harmonious parent-child relationships are the norm, not the exception, when parents set limits while being considerate, warm, and encouraging of autonomy.

Yet despite research findings, and regardless of type of family structure, social class, race, religion, or community, parents tend to anticipate the early years

of adolescence with dread. This is so whether the family in question is the traditional "parent(s) and natural child-(ren)" or less traditional groupings of people sharing their lives and living space.

In this paper, Laurence Steinberg examines family development as children and parents progress through early adolescence and early middle age, two periods of marked change and growth. Families, as Steinberg says, usually manage to change as the individuals within them change, to build more mature relationships, and yes, even to enjoy themselves.

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Early adolescence is a uniquely critical time in human development. During this frequently overlooked period of growth and change, young people emerge from the dependence of childhood to face the freedom, responsibility, and conflicting values of adulthood.

The Center for Early Adolescence urges positive intervention by adults who work with the age group, based on an understanding of healthy adolescent development. Established through support from the Mary Reynolds Babcock Foundation, the Ford Foundation, and the Lyndhurst Foundation, the Center is located at the University of North Carolina at Chapel Hill. Through an interdisciplinary network of concerned professionals, the Center offers training, technical assistance, and information to those who work with 10- to 15-year-old youth. In seeking to improve the quality of services provided to young people, the Center also works with government officials and other policy-makers to promote the healthy development of all young adolescents.

Understanding Families with Young Adolescents is one of a series of papers on 10- to 15-year-old youth as they develop in their families, their communities, and their schools. The series is edited by Leah Lefstein. The bibliographies and bibliographic essays are prepared by members of the research committee of the Young Adult Services Division, the American Library Association. YASD members Alice Naylor and Evie Wilson prepared the bibliography and bibliographic essay on early adolescence and the family. Funds for the publication of this booklet were provided by the Mary Reynolds Babcock Foundation.

—Joan Scheff Lipsitz
Director

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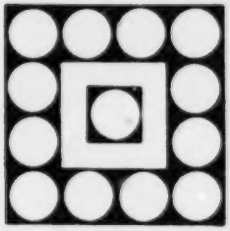

Early adolescence is the time when the young person begins to shed the dependence of childhood and starts the long, slow process of adaptation to the independence and responsibility of adulthood. In many ways, early adolescence is a time of disequilibrium for the young person. The physical changes of puberty are greeted with an ambivalent mixture of excitement and suspicion. The rapid and dramatic development of intellectual abilities causes the adolescent to be temporarily lost in endless, involved daydreams, much to the displeasure of parents and teachers. And shifts in status -- some gradual, others abrupt -- leave the early adolescent caught between two worlds, childhood and adulthood, equally uncomfortable in either.

Only in the last 25 years have we come to see the crisis of early adolescence as normative; no longer is this period viewed as a time of mental disturbance. We have come to understand that early adolescence is transitional, indeed characterized more by change than stability, but by change that is expected, predictable, normal, and perhaps even welcome. In fact, a moderate amount of stress during this time is somewhat beneficial, in that it forces the young person to develop coping skills that will have a great value in the future.

Although views of early adolescence as a developmental period have been modified, ideas about families during this life stage have remained archaic. Many professionals who work with youth and their families still insist that relationships between teenagers and parents are full of tension, that storm and stress are typical, and that family conflict is inevitable. Since adolescents themselves were once viewed as suffering from a psychological affliction that would pass only when the adolescent era ended, it makes sense that this is what was also believed about adolescents' families. But now that we have a better, and in many ways more realistic, view of what early adolescence is for the individual, it is time for a revised view of what early adolescence is for the family. Because, quite frankly, the view that conflict is characteristic of family life during this life stage is glaringly inconsistent with the research evidence on the subject.[1]

To be sure, adolescents and their parents do have difficulties—but, then, again, so do young children and their *parents, and so do adults and* their *parents.*

A great deal of research has been conducted on family relations during adolescence, and the available data simply do not show that conflict between adolescents and their parents is inescapable, expected, or greater than family conflict during preceding or subsequent periods. Many studies indicate, on the contrary, that most young people and their parents enjoy positive family relations and are generally quite satisfied with the way they get along. Few young people complain about the relationships they have with their mothers and fathers. The generation gap, too, turns out to be a grossly exaggerated figment of the media's

imagination. A closer reexamination of the fundamental values of young people and their parnets, both today and during the 1960s, reveals a surprising compatibility. When teenagers and their parents do differ, they are most likely to do so over day-to-day interests -- styles of dress, tastes in music, and the like -- and rarely over basic concerns such as long-term educational or occupational plans.[2] Nevertheless, conflict-oriented views of the family during early adolescence persist, and they pervade our ideas about family functioning, about the diagnosis of family difficulties, and about the treatment of family problems.

In this essay, I offer a new way of looking at the early adolescent's family, a perspective that acknowledges the transitional nature of these years, but that does not focus on conflict, tension, or storm and stress. The framework I describe here can be used to understand families at this life stage both in terms of their normal functioning and in terms of their problems. It is a framework that is both systemic (i.e., the family is seen as a system) and developmental (i.e., the family is seen as having its own course of predictable development).

THE LIFE-CYCLE OF FAMILIES

Like individuals, families grow, develop, and change over the course of time in ordered and predictable ways. Family functions and relationships alter in response to changes in different family members. When a first child is born, for example, the husband and wife become father and mother as well. and they take on new roles and responsibilities. The new baby changes both their lives as individuals and their marital relationship.

Families with newly-born children are consistently and predictably unlike childless families or families with school-aged children.

As families grow and develop, they move through a series of stages -- called "family life-cycle stages" -- each with characteristic tasks and patterns of interaction. A family with school-aged children functions in ways different from a family with older children who have already left home, and the kinds of experiences that families face at each of these life-cycle stages are markedly dissimilar. If a family experiences dysfunction during early adolescence, therefore, it is likely to be related to developmental tasks the individual family members experience at this time.

How do families with early adolescents differ from families at other life-cycle stages? What makes one life-cycle period more difficult for the family than another? And what is it about early adolescence that might make it especially trying for some teenagers and their parents?

In general, the critical developmental periods for the family are those times characterized by fundamental, rapid, and/or dramatic change in one of the family members.

Such periods are especially disquieting for the family because its members' competencies and concerns are changing, and the system must adapt to them. When a number of its individual members are changing simultaneously, the family experiences periods of even greater disequilibrium. Adolescence, because it is a time of profound change in the child and in the child's middle-aged parents, is one

such critical period. And it is because the family system must adapt to changes both in the adolescent and in the parents that this time is trying for some families.

In order to understand how families cope during adolescence, let us examine first the changes that occur in individual family members, then the new tasks and the adjustment required of the family system. This adjustment must take place, because the family's methods of interacting prior to adolescence are no longer suitable; it must now take into account the new competencies and concerns of the family members.

Family differences occurring during adolescence result from an inability on the part of the family system to adapt to the changes in family members that take place during this period.

What, then, are the changes that appear to characterize individual development during this time? How should the family system adapt in response to them?

DEVELOPMENTAL CHANGES DURING ADOLESCENCE AND MID-LIFE

Most parents are between the ages of 35 and 45 when their children are adolescents.[3] Ironically, this means that most families experience the vicissitudes of early adolescence and mid-life at the same time.

The key changes of early adolescence and of mid-life occur across three domains: physical, intellectual, and societal. The physical domain includes changes in physical appearance and competencies. The in-

tellectual domain includes variations in the ways in which experiences are viewed and understood. And the societal domain includes alterations of the individual's position in the larger society. Marked developments in all three of the areas take place during both early adolescence and mid-life.

CHANGES DURING ADOLESCENCE.[4]

Changes in appearance, stature and reproductive capacity are associated with the onset of puberty. However, pubertal maturation is significant not only because it affects the young person, but because others are affected as well. Since some young adolescents do not look like children, they elicit altered responses from their parents, friends and teachers. For example, our expectations for young adolescents who appear mature are likely to exceed those we have for pre-pubertal youngsters who have not yet experienced physical change. The family must adjust to the new physical appearance, competencies and desires of the young teenager, perhaps entailing changes in physical affection from the parent of the opposite sex, in the amount of privacy the adolescent demands or is given, and in the rules which govern the youngster's social life.

In addition to adjusting to the new look of adolescence, the family is forced to acknowledge changes in the way the adolescent thinks. The ability to think in terms of possibilities and to imagine hypothetical situations broadens markedly during adolescence. A set of cognitive capabilities, called formal operations, emerges around the time of puberty. This change involves a great leap in the young person's ability to think in logically advanced and more abstract terms. At times,

the adolescent is able to think in a manner as sophisticated as that of the parent. More importantly, the adolescent is unlikely to accept the parent's word as always correct, particularly if the adult's ideas are not logically founded. This intellectual change requires adaptation on the part of the entire family. The system now has an additional person who is capable of complex thought and reasoning. As a result, family discussions may become more complicated, and the adolescent may turn a minor request into an exercise in logical argument. The family may have to modify its method of making decisions -- particularly those decisions directly affecting the adolescent -- and the manner in which discussions are conducted.

Finally, the family must adapt to the expectations and privileges that society accords the young adolescent. Such privileges and expectations -- and the responsibilities and rights that accompany them -- influence the adolescent's position in the family as well. After all, the family lives within the larger social system from which these age-linked expectations emanate. The family must adjust to the fact that the adolescent is permitted, if only tacitly, to date, to spend time with friends outside the protective environment of home and neighborhood, to select a course of study in school, or to work for pay. In many families, parental expectations for what the adolescent should and should not be permitted to do may differ from those applied by society. When this situation arises, compromise must be negotiated, as the family adapts to the adolescent's newly attained status.

CHANGES DURING MID-LIFE.

The teenager is not the only one who is changing during this period in the family's

life-cycle. Researchers have found that the decade between 35 and 45 is an especially critical period in adult development. Recent studies have indicated, for example, the presence of a series of mid-life crises during this decade.[5] Just as the family must adjust to changes in the early adolescent, it must also cope with the accompanying transitions of mid-life.

Mid-life changes parallel those of early adolescence, occurring across physical, intellectual and societal domains. At mid-life there is increased concern with physical competency and appearance[6] (even though, for the most part, adults tend to perceive greater alterations in their physical appearance than actually occur). Understandably, there is increased concern with health, physical attractiveness, and sexual virility around this time, because it is at mid-life that the individual first senses that the process of physical decline may soon begin. And while actual physical decline does not really begin until later in the life-cycle, the fact that mid-life adults think that it is happening to them is probably more important than the reality of the situation. Just as the family must adjust to physical changes in the early adolescent, it must also accommodate different, but just as significant, physical changes in the parents. Their concerns are shifting too, and the entire family system must cope.

Unlike the change in intellectual ability characteristic of the young adolescent, the middle-aged adult experiences a shift in time perspective.[7] Prior to mid-life, years are counted in terms of how long the individual has been alive. One's accomplishments are measured against a time

standard, and that standard is one's age. But after mid-life, one's time perspective changes, and time comes to be measured in terms of how many years one has left to live. Because of this shift in viewpoint, possibilities for changing one's life after the middle years seem limited.

Finally, adults perceive a change in society's attitude during the decade of mid-life. In all cultures, there comes a time when the "ruling" generation must yield some of its power, status, and influence to a younger group of people. In our society, much of this shift takes place during mid-life, as society alters its view to accommodate the rise of the next generation. At work, new and upwardly mobile employees may threaten the mid-life adult's security and feelings of competence. In stores and in the media, new sty'es and fads reinforce the sensation that a younger generation is moving into a position of dominance. And in the community, the ideas of younger persons are applauded as "fresh" and those of mid-life adults as "old fashioned." The effects on the individual of this societal shift vary -- some find it liberating, others depressing -- but in either case, it is an additional change that the family system must integrate.

COMPLEMENTARY TRANSITIONS

Both mid-life and early adolescence, then, are transitional periods that involve coping with physical, intellectual, and societal changes experienced not only by the adolescent or the parent but by the entire family as well. What makes this a challenging time for the family is that the system must cope with the metamorphosis of parent and child simultaneously.

Ironically, early adolescents and mid-life parents seem simultaneously to be developing in opposite directions. In order to cope with the changes, the family must understand this state of affairs. Consider the following facts:

1) Just as the adolescent enters puberty, approaching the peak strength and virility glorified in popular culture, the mid-life parent is beginning to worry about appearance, health, and sexual attractiveness.

2) Just as the adolescent finds a new way of looking at the world, a viewpoint that involves a broadening of possibilities and endless hypothetical situations to consider, the mid-life parent undergoes a shift in perspective, a shift toward limits and boundaries, toward the feeling that time is running out.

3) And, just as the adolescent prepares for entrance into adult society and begins to consider seriously issues of work and career, the mid-life parent looks back -- for better or worse -- on his or her own occupational history and faces an occupational plateau. Whereas society recognizes that the adolescent is just starting out, it labels the mid-life adult as having already had a chance.

On all three counts, the adolescent and the mid-life parent are moving in developmentally opposite directions. If this movement is not understood and accepted, life together can be filled with confusion, misunderstanding, and disagreement. Where the adolescent strives to expand, the parent may push to constrict.

Yet, despite the potential for difficulty during this period, most families do not experience early adolescence as a time of great upheaval. Excessive conflict is not an inherent feature of family life during this period; rather, its presence may indicate that the family members are unable or unwilling to adapt to their mid-life and adolescent roles.

TRANSFORMATIONS IN FAMILY RELATIONS

Family relationships should be modified to be more in line with the new needs, concerns, and competencies of the individuals involved.

Interactions that were well-suited to preadolescents and pre-mid-life parents are no longer appropriate once this family life-stage has begun, and new, more suitable relationships must develop. Two examples may illustrate this point.

The adolescent's new reasoning abilities make it exceedingly difficult for a parent to exercise previously unquestioned authority. Prior to adolescence, it is relatively simple for a parent to lay down a set of rules and for the preadolescent to abide by them. At adolescence, however, the child begins to develop intellectual abilities which may be equal to those of the parents. The young person may feel entitled to have more say in family decision-making and may no longer accept parents' words as final.

The emergence of independent behavior may be construed by parents as adolescent rebelliousness. In fact, the behavior is likely to have little to do with the adolescent's feelings toward the parents, and

more to do with a desire to exercise new intellectual skills. A healthy family system will adjust to this development by including the adolescent in family discussions on a more adult level; an unhealthy system will refuse to change, and will remain locked into increasingly inappropriate modes of interaction.

A second example involves accommodation on the part of the family system to changes in the parent. A mid-life parent who is especially concerned over changes in his or her physical appearance and attractiveness may greet the adolescent's new social life with ambivalence. Unconsciously, this parent may be jealous of the adolescent's youthfulness, and may react either by attempting to find vicarious enjoyment through excessive involvement in the child's life or by attempting to restrict the child's activities in order to avoid feeling envious.

Again, modifications in family relationships are in order. Parent and adolescent should gradually become less involved in each other's affairs as the child matures, not only for the sake of the adolescent, but for the parent's benefit as well. The task for most families -- and it is by no means an easy one -- is to maintain emotional involvement, in the form of concern and caring, while gradually moving toward a relationship characterized by greater behavioral autonomy. But even the move toward increased autonomy must be negotiated gradually: young adolescents need fewer limits than do preadolescents, but they do still need limits. The sort of over-involvement and intrusiveness that characterizes many parents' behavior toward their preadolescent children is no longer appropriate at early

adolescence, but neither is a total and abrupt abandonment of all limits and guidelines. Both extremes are characteristic of families that are incapable of adapting and changing.

EQUILIBRIUM, DISEQUILIBRIUM, AND DYSFUNCTION

When changes in family relationships do occur during this period, they are not negotiated overnight, nor are they conceived consciously. Rather, these shifts and adjustments occur gradually, in a somewhat disorganized fashion, as individuals try on new roles and experiment with new ways of relating to each other.

It is helpful to think of the family as a system with properties not unlike those of physical systems.[8] Systems move back and forth between phases of equilibrium, or balance, and disequilibrium, or imbalance. When a system is at equilibrium, its component parts are in balance with each other, and the system functions. When a system's component parts become imbalanced, however, the system enters into a period of disequilibrium, and functioning becomes temporarily impaired until balance is restored.

In the family, disequilibrium results when an individual member has changed but the system has not yet fully adapted by altering relationships.

The family system is thus thrown into a temporary period of imbalance. Balance, or equilibrium, is restored only when the system has adapted to the changes that have occurred, and relationships have been modified.

Because the balance achieved in relationships prior to these years is upset by the changes of puberty and mid-life, early adolescence introduces the potential for family disequilibrium. The extent that the system adapts to these changes by forging more appropriate relationships will influence the amount and duration of family disequilibrium and discomfort. Disequilibrium can be a very positive force because it motivates families to change. On occasion, however, families experiencing temporary imbalance seek professional help. It is important that practitioners working with these families permit such periods of disequilibrium to take their course, naturally and gradually, and resist the temptation to force some sort of equilibrium prematurely. The practitioner must discern whether the problem is caused by temporary *disequilibrium* -- that is, the family will naturally and gradually develop healthy and adaptive relationships -- or by actual *dysfunction* -- that is, the family is locked into a state of imbalance from which it cannot move without professional assistance.

FAMILIES WITH PROBLEMS

Although most families experience this somewhat uncomfortable disequilibrium from time to time during adolescence, the great majority of them emerge from these years with relationships that are healthy and more mature. Preadolescent modes of interacting are replaced by those more suitable for parents and adolescents. Almost magically, as if no one had really

changed anything intentionally, relationships improve markedly. Parent and adolescent alike feel relief, and sense that the other's difficult phase has finally ended. In many respects, the judgment is a correct one.

For a small minority of families, however, the generally temporary disequilibrium persists. These families are not experiencing early adolescent growing pains, but rather, serious difficulties probably in need of professional attention. For some reason, they are unable to adapt to changes that have taken place in one or more family members. They are therefore unable to restore balance, or equilibrium, to a system that has been disrupted by the developmental changes of the period. This dysfunction -- this failure to adapt -- takes one of two different forms, and it is important to determine into which group a family falls, since each type of dysfunction necessitates a particular type of intervention.

One form of dysfunction is characteristic of families who are unable or reluctant to modify patterns of interaction. These families fear disequilibrium and defend against any changes in relationships that might alter what is perceived as a peaceful balance. They may deny that any changes have taken place in the adolescent or in either of the parents. Of course, changes have taken place and must be accommodated. The denial can only persist for so long; finally, the system will lose its abilities to function.

Many family problems that appear to involve rebelliousness on the part of the

adolescent actually revolve around this failure on the part of the family to adapt. Most adolescents can adequately handle far more autonomy than can younger children. In healthy families, parents grant this autonomy gradually, as the teenager develops emotionally and intellectually. This change in autonomy-granting is an important part of the adaptation process, and parents who have little difficulty adapting to their children's maturation rarely have "rebellious" adolescents.

But some parents insist on adhering to the child-rearing practices that served them well when their children were younger. They see no reason to change; they are unable, or perhaps even afraid, to do so. They remain bound to old, and now inappropriate, ways of relating to their children, who increasingly demand to be treated as young adults. When subtle and reasonable demands fail to achieve a change in their parents' behavior, adolescents take more forceful steps. Though we might label this behavior as rebellion, it is actually an understandable response to a dysfunctional system.

It is important that the practitioner understand that disequilibrium is a healthy state that all families should experience during early adolescence. When families are unable or unwilling to bear the temporary discomfort of these growing pains, more serious dysfunctional problems will generally result. The practitioner can help these families to form more adaptive relationships.

The second potential source of family problems during early adolescence occurs when a family enters into a phase of disequilibrium, but, unable to move on, be-

comes trapped in an imbalanced state. The family appears disorganized and confused, needing a great deal of direction.

Changes in the adolescent or in the parents are acknowledged by these families, but the changes are not really accommodated. The family rejects its preadolescent ways of interacting but develops no suitable replacement, and disorganization sets in. The parents, for example, may have realized that the adolescent is capable of handling increased autonomy, but instead of granting it thoughtfully and gradually, have suddenly abandoned all rules and guidelines, and left the adolescent without any limits. This condition often becomes so exacerbated that by the time the practitioner sees the family, the adolescent is playing the role of the head of the household. The family has recognized that the adolescent is no longer a child, and that relationships should be modified, but it is unable to forge healthy, functional patterns of interaction.

In this case, the practitioner can guide the family toward modifying its relationships to fit the new capacities and concerns of the family members. These families have realized -- if only on an unconscious level -- that the types of relationships which existed prior to adolescence are no longer appropriate. Their difficulty is in determining in which direction to move.

EARLY ADOLESCENCE– A TIME OF FAMILY GROWTH

The changes of early adolescence and mid-life produce new demands which are not

always easily integrated by the family system. The adaptation process is gradual, sometimes even painfully slow. Although early adolescence may not be an easy time for the family -- no period during which family members are changing so rapidly is -- it is a time of important family development and growth. All families must make the shift from relationships suited to parent and *child* to those appropriate for parent and *young adult*. In the long run, the latter type of relationship is more satisfying to all parties: it is the process of reaching satisfaction that can be uncomfortable.

For those families who experience special difficulties, practitioners can provide support, direction, guidance, and education. However, those who counsel families must understand the developmental changes characteristic of adolescence and of mid-life and must be able to distinguish between disequilibrium and dysfunction in families experiencing these changes. A more thorough understanding of the interaction between the life-cycles of individuals and the life-cycles of families is essential to our understanding and treatment of individual and family problems.

We can also improve the family education of parents and teenagers. The changes of early adolescence and of mid-life should not come as a surprise to the very individuals who experience them. The more we can do to educate parents and teenagers about the changes they can expect in themselves and in each other, the easier it will be for families to function as healthy, changing, and growing systems.

Notes

[1]See, for example, Elizabeth Douvan and Joseph Adelson, The Adolescent Experience (New York: John Wiley & Sons, 1966).

[2]John Conger, "A World They Never Knew," Daedalus 100, No. 4 (Fall 1971).

[3]Lillian E. Troll, Early and Middle Adulthood (Monterey, Calif.: Brooks/Cole, 1975).

[4]For an excellent discussion of changes at adolescence, see John Hill, "Understanding Adolescent Development," Televised Role Models and Young Adolescents: An ACT Research Workshop (Newtonville, Mass.: Action for Children's Television, 1978).

[5]See, for example, Daniel J. Levinson, "The Mid-Life Transition: A Period in Adult Psychosocial Development," Psychiatry, 40 (1977), pp 99-112.

[6]Roger Gould, "The Phases of Adult Life," American Journal of Psychiatry, 129, No. 5 (1972), 521-531.

[7]Bernice Neugarten, "The Psychology of Aging: An Overview," Master Lectures on Developmental Psychology (Washington, D.C.: American Psychological Association, 1975).

[8]Salvador Minuchin, Families and Family Therapy (Cambridge, Mass.: Harvard University Press, 1974).

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EARLY ADOLESCENCE AND MID-LIFE: A BIBLIOGRAPHIC ESSAY

by Alice P. Naylor and Evie Wilson
Young Adult Services
American Library Association

In addition to the ideas expressed by Dr. Steinberg, the developmental characteristics of young adolescents and their middle-aged parents have been examined from various other perspectives.

The historical emergence of the phenomenon of adolescence in the United States is thoroughly reported in Rites of Passage by Joseph F. Kett (1977). Kett presents convincing evidence that the origins of adolescent behavior are neither psychological nor physiological, but rather social and political.

In a similar vein, F. Raymond Marks discusses the legal history of adolescence in his article, "Detours on the Road to Maturity: A View of the Legal Conception of Growing Up and Letting Go" (1975). Marks says youth is a period of disenfranchisement. Though in some respects immature, adolescents are perceptive enough to object to a lack of acceptance and support from the adult world.

In the third edition of Issues in Adolescent Psychology (1977), Chapter Fifteen addresses the question of the myth or reality of the "generation gap," summarizing public opinion, scholarly theory, and empirical findings. Citing a study of parents'and youths' perceptions of the

other generation's values and behavior, the authors say that the parents' "negative evaluations of the goals of the younger generation did not generally extend to their own children." Suggested readings are included.

UNDERSTANDING EARLY ADOLESCENCE

A comprehensive and absorbing collection of essays taking the developmental approach, "Twelve to Sixteen: Early Adolescence," appears in the Fall 1971 issue of Daedalus. The articles by noted authorities examine physical changes in young adolescents, including the earlier onset of puberty; family interactions; societal influences on adolescence; and intellectual development. The collection also includes reports of studies on the political and moral philosophies of youth, as well as information on black youth. A personal account of his own painful adolescence by Thomas Cottle adds meaningful insight.

"Requirements for Healthy Development of Adolescent Youth" by Konopka (1973) lists eight important conditions to achieve healthy development. These include gaining experience in decision making; participating as members of a household and as responsible members of society; interacting with peers and acquiring a sense of belonging; reflecting on self in relation to others and discovering self; discussing conflicting values and formulating a value system; experimenting with identity and relationships; developing a feeling of accountability; and cultivating a capacity to enjoy life.

Two journals, Adolescence and the Journal of Youth and Adolescence, report current research and theories of adolescence. In an article published in Adolescence, "Understanding the Young Adolescent" (1978), David Elkind says that while many young adolescents may, as Steinberg suggests, have arrived at the cognitive stage of formal operations, they may not yet be able to control their newly attained mental powers. Elkind believes young people may fail to distinguish between valuing an ideal and regulating behavior in light of that ideal. If changes in behavior lag behind intellectual awareness, it is easy to understand why adolescent behavior may be irritating to adults.

In 1977, Joan Lipsitz, now the director of the Center for Early Adolescence, produced a well-documented review of research and programs concerning early adolescence, Growing Up Forgotten. Topics include the young adolescent and schools, service institutions, voluntary youth-serving agencies the juvenile justice system and the family. She states, "American society functions on the basis of several widespread myths about adolescents, who they are and how they are best served." The myths of storm and stress between parents and young adolescents and of peer group tyranny are refuted in Lipsitz's chapter on the family.

Two other valuable summaries of research are "Modal Patterns in American Adolescents" by Elizabeth Douvan and Martin Gold (1966) and "Intellectual Development During Adolescence" by Edith D. Neimark (1975).

In "Changes in Black Sons and Daughters: A Panel Analysis of Black Adolescents'

Orientation Toward Their Parents" (1972), David Nolle reports a study of Southern urban adolescents who over a three-year period indicated their feelings toward their parents of closeness, openness, respect, and susceptibility to moral influence.

MID-LIFE AND EARLY ADOLESCENCE

In "Understanding Families with Young Adolescents," Steinberg identifies the developmental characteristics of mid-life parents in relationship to their young adolescent children. The life-cycle perspective is also presented in "Adolescent and Parent: Interactions Between Developmental Stages" by Barbara Smith (1976). Smith emphasizes the need to study the interactions between adolescent and middle-aged parent in order to understand conflicts. Both adolescent and parent are seeking "self" apart from the family. Smith mentions the common traits of youth and mid-life. She also urges greater awareness for the concerns of mid-life, including aging, health and vitality, menopause and impotence, waning of parenthood, career plateau, marital status, and the reality of death. Smith specifies areas needing further research as well.

An optimistic, helpful analysis on "Middle Age and a Sense of Future" is available in the Merrill-Palmer Quarterly (1978). Judith Bardwick defines middle age as the time when "one realizes that decisions which were made lightly have become permanent." Parents are forced by their children to acknowledge their age. To create a sense of future is essential for the middle-aged person, according to Bardwick.

Two timely studies explore how mid-life adults perceive adolescents. The first, by Coleman, George, and Holt, appeared in The Journal of Genetic Psychology (1977). Families from poor working-class backgrounds disclosed, for example, that on traits such as "honest/dishonest," adults evaluated adolescents the same as themselves, while the adolescents evaluated adults more highly! Conflicts between the adolescent and parent are apt to center on mundane matters such as laziness or tidiness, and not on basic values. Adolescents, they conclude, idealize rather than disparage older generations.

In the second study, Guzzetta reports on "Acquisition and Transfer of Empathy by the Parents of Early Adolescents Through Structured Learning Training " (1976). Thirty-seven mothers of sixth, seventh, and eighth-grade students were trained through simulated transactions to respond empathetically to their children. The results support the effectiveness of structured learning training (modeling, role-playing, and social reinforcement).

RESOURCES FOR FAMILIES

The U.S. Department of Health, Education and Welfare suggests solutions to parents for both severe and minor problems of adolescents in its pamphlet, "An Adolescent in Your Home" (1975).

The parents described in an article by Justice and Duncan (1976) found Parent Effectiveness Training (P.E.T.) to be useful. This approach to better communicating emphasizes three key elements: listening, communicating needs and feelings, and problem-solving. Many local social service agencies offer P.E.T. courses for parents and youth workers.

Grando and Ginsberg record a successful program in "Communication in the Father-Son Relationship" (1976). Based on Relationship Enhancement methods developed by Bernard Guerney, Jr., this Parent-Adolescent Relationship Development (PARD) project worked with fathers from 35-55 years of age and sons from 11-16. Program excerpts with dialogue are included.

Resources for parents of pre and early adolescents are given in James' "Living with Children in Transition" (1977). Books, libraries, television programs, and specific self-awareness projects are possible sources of help.

Survival Kit for Parents of Teenagers by Melton (1979) presents in chatty, question-and-answer format solutions to many areas of concern, including the expense of rearing a teenager, reconnecting and improving lines of communication, creating a home environment, and the adolescent's search for identity. Melton has devised an "Adult Survival Skills Scoreboard" and tells how to use it with adolescents. The text is praised by Dr. Robert C. Prall of the Medical College of Pennsylvania.

Young adult librarians can recommend several fiction titles suitable for parents and young adolescents. "Am I Normal?" a film describing one young adolescent boy's attempts to understand his sexual development, is excellent for viewing by parents and young teenagers.

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All materials included in this essay are available through your local public or college library -- either within local collections or through inter-library loan.

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